

wrote—Socrates has become a spokesman for Plato's own philosophy. Yet the personality of Socrates recognized by modern scholars as most authentic is Socrates as portrayed by Plato. Numerous other accounts of Socrates—such as the comical character Socrates in Aristophanes' play *Clouds* and the day-to-day advisor that appears in the works of the historian Xenophon—survive, yet these accounts are considered to be minor sources in comparison to Plato.

Achievements

Socrates was probably born in Athens in the spring of 468 B.C.E., and he lived there all his life. He was reportedly the son of a stonemason and a midwife, and he had three sons of his own—two of whom were still small children at the time of his death. His wife Xanthippe was famously ill-tempered; stories about Socrates, recorded in the works of Xenophon, include episodes of public fights between the two which often included acts of violence. (Despite the marital discord, Plato's dialogue the *Phaedo* describes a tearful Xanthippe leaving Socrates' prison cell the day before his death in 399 B.C.E., indicating the presence of genuine feelings between the two.) Socrates was a contemporary of the Sophists, and talked and argued with many of them, but the Sophists were itinerant teachers who charged tuition fees, whereas Socrates never left Athens and did not charge his disciples tuition. He originally was attracted to the doctrine of Anaxagoras, and tradition made him a pupil of Anaxagoras' disciple, Archelaus, who kept a school in Athens; after Archelaus left Athens, Socrates probably took over as headmaster of the school. For the last twenty or 25 years of his life,

Socrates was a magnet for the bright, well-to-do young men of Athens who honed their debating techniques by matching their wits with his own. Some of these pupils used the skills they learned in ways that Socrates did not intend, however, and it led to serious charges against the philosopher. It cannot be denied that Socrates taught his Athenian disciples to question the basis of the democratic constitution of Athens. The underlying assumption of democracy as it was practiced in Athens was not that all men were born equal, but that every man was capable of performing the functions that public office required, provided that he was honest. It was not necessary to have professional training to hold a government post. Hence citizens were chosen by lot to hold important public offices; the chief exceptions were the ten generals who commanded the army and navy, who were elected each year. Socrates was fond of pointing out that a person would go to a cobbler skilled at shoemaking to have his shoes made, or to a doctor trained in medicine if he was ill, but if he wanted someone to hold high office in the state, he chose a man on the street. Socrates' logic was sound enough, but its inevitable conclusion was that cities should be governed by officials with training in government.

Death

Source Citation

"Socrates." *Arts and Humanities Through the Eras*. Ed. Edward I. Bleiberg, et al. Vol. 2: Ancient Greece and Rome 1200 B.C.E.-476 C.E. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 250-254. *Student Resources In Context*. Web. 16 Apr. 2013.

Document URL

http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?failOverType=&query=&prodId=SUIC&windowstate=normal&contentModules=&mode=view&displayGroupName=Reference&limiter=&currPage=&disableHighlighting=false&displayGroups=&sortBy=&source=&search_wit